

# LETITIA'S DAUGHTER.

BY ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS.

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Tabitha Allen took Eliza's hat, laid it on a table near by, motioned her to a seat and stood in the middle of the room, looking solemnly down at her.

"If I tell you something," said she, pressing her forehead into an impressive frown, "will you promise not to tell?"

"I promise," said Eliza. "On your word of honor?" repeated Eliza. "I won't breathe it to a living soul. See! I cross my heart and body." And she laughingly suited the action to the word.

Tabitha took her seat at the window, and, searching in a cumbersome basket for a needless stocking, found one, slipped the burning ball into it and slowly thrust her needle through an emery ball in the shape of an overgrown strawberry, while Eliza leaned eagerly forward, waiting to hear.

Tabitha threaded her needle before she spoke. "There's to be a wedding in the neighborhood pretty soon," she said then. "A wedding!" cried Eliza. "What! You don't mean next door—Letitia Kinsman and Tom Jones?"

Tabitha's thin lips wreathed themselves into a sphinxlike smile. "That's what everybody thinks, I know," said she, "but there'll be a little surprise written 'em. It ain't Letitia this time, as it happens."

"Then who in the world can it be?" asked Eliza breathlessly. Tabitha waived the question. "I've been living next door to Letitia Kinsman ever since her husband died,"

she said, "and I know all about her from A to Z; and that she's told me much herself—Letitia never was no great hand to talk; she's a close mouthed woman, especially when it comes to anything concernin her own affairs, but you can't help pickin up a mite of information as you go along, livin so close—that is, if you've got any eyes at all."

She worked awhile in silence before she began again. "Letitia wore her crape a good long time for such a pretty woman, and it was a long time, too, before she began to notice, as much as a year or more. So when Tom Jones took to seein her home from meetin and hangin over the gate with her till the moon went down nobody was much surprised. Even if Letitia ain't as young as she used to be she's a mighty pretty woman—mighty pretty! And smart! There ain't a smarter woman in Plainville then Letitia Kinsman."

"Seems like, even if them widows ain't pretty, they're kinder takin some how or other," put in Eliza. "They allus catches the eye of the men."

Tabitha nodded assent as she ran her long needle through every other stitch in the diminutive lacework she was weaving in the spot where the heel of the stocking had been.

"That's true enough," said she, "and, as I say, it begun to look like Letitia was havin things all her own way. She was a widow and pretty yet and smart. There never was a church sociable but what Letitia had every man in the room around her a-sittin of their sides laughin at the funny things she said right off plank down, while the rest of us thought of what we mought have said after we'd got half way home."

She slapped her hand over her mouth in the effort to conceal a slight yawn. "Yes," she concluded, "she was smart—there's no denyin that—about most things. But there was one thing she wa'n't smart about."

"And what was that?" demanded Eliza. "When everything was goin her way and Tom had popped the question or was about to pop it, and that—here she grasped the stocking more securely and looked cross-eyed as she ran the needle back the other way, the point toward her—"was one thing I never could quite make out, whether he ever asked her in so many words to marry him or not. If he didn't, all I've got to say is that he was mighty near it, sendin her little sweet smilin boks and settin out on the front porch with her till all hours of the night and, as I said before, hangin on the gate; not only that, but comin sometimes early in the mornin before I'd had time to get my dishes washed; so early that if you hadn't known better you'd thought he'd been hangin there on that gate the forelong night."

Eliza was in a spasm of suspense. "What did she do that wa'n't smart?" she begged to know. Tabitha had finished darning the stocking. She laid it across her knee, smiled complacently at the dexterity of her own handiwork and slipped the darning ball into its mate.

"She brought that big girl of hers home out of the boardin school," she announced with an intonation of disgust. "That's what she did."

"And Tom fell in love with her?" "Of course! What else could she have expected, I'd like to know? Letitia's pretty, but her daughter is prettier. Besides, she is 17 years younger, and that makes a good deal of difference with a man."

"Tom Jones is every bit and grain as old as Letitia Kinsman," declared Eliza indignantly. She snipped off a stray thread with her scissors.

"And I was right," she went on. "It was. From that time on it was Tom and Letitia's daughter a-settin out on the porch together and hangin on the gate together, and it was the girl that got the little boks and put 'em in the vase on the mantelpiece in the parlor where they could see out the whole house while Letitia stood by and looked on."

"When she first come, Letitia was so bright and cheery you'd taken 'em for sisters if you'd seen 'em settin side by side, but it wa'n't many weeks before Letitia begun to get hollow eyed and white and showed her age, every day of it. Just when she'd oughter been a-bloomin her very prettiest if she wanted to be any sort of match for the girl at all. It was pitiful to see the change in her. She got so she didn't make any more of her cute little jokes, and she never laughed any more. I missed that laugh of hers. I used to like to hear it, settin here by the window sewin. The girl laughed a-plenty, but Letitia she got quieter and quieter until at last you'd thought it was a ghost of a woman creepin about the house at her work, laggin sort of tired-like and worn out as if she'd somehow come to the end of her row."

She sighed as she unwound the darning cotton from a black ball, bit off the end and once more threaded the large eye of her needle.

"Don't I know that? But he's a man, remember, and men don't get old, they say. Anyway, the older they get the better they likes to hang around a girl that's just about fryin size. And that's the reason I says the munit I see that young thing jump out of the bus and run up the walk to the house, her cheeks a-bloomin like roses and her eyes a-shinin. It's all up with Letitia! Them was my very words, it's all up with Letitia!"

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She sighed as she unwound the darning cotton from a black ball, bit off the end and once more threaded the large eye of her needle.

"Don't I know that? But he's a man, remember, and men don't get old, they say. Anyway, the older they get the better they likes to hang around a girl that's just about fryin size. And that's the reason I says the munit I see that young thing jump out of the bus and run up the walk to the house, her cheeks a-bloomin like roses and her eyes a-shinin. It's all up with Letitia! Them was my very words, it's all up with Letitia!"

"One night last week," she continued, "I saw Tom and the girl out in the moonlight together as usual hangin on the gate. I could hear it creakin, swingin backwards and forwards. The girl's laugh come floatin to me once in awhile, too, a pretty laugh like Letitia's, only younger and gayer. So I thought now Letitia is in the house in the dark all by herself, and I'll go in and keep her company. I had borrowed a spoonful of tea from her the day before. It would be a good excuse to pretend I'd come to pay it back. I went around to the kitchen door. It was the nearest way; besides, them two was out in front, and I knew they wouldn't want to be disturbed. The door was open. Letitia and me has been neighbors so long that I didn't think nothin of walkin right on in. I went through the dinin room to the settin room and stood still in the middle of it lookin around for Letitia. There was a cough by the window, with the moonlight streamin over it, and Letitia was layin on it face down, like some-

body had been there. "That's true enough," said she, "and, as I say, it begun to look like Letitia was havin things all her own way. She was a widow and pretty yet and smart. There never was a church sociable but what Letitia had every man in the room around her a-sittin of their sides laughin at the funny things she said right off plank down, while the rest of us thought of what we mought have said after we'd got half way home."

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